

To Whom it May Concern,

I have been a public school teacher in Connecticut for 23 years and I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 6884, An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention, and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession. This bill includes provisions that are essential to ensuring the quality of our state's education system and the well-being of teachers.

First and foremost, I want to highlight the importance of establishing a statewide minimum salary for teachers. At present, many teachers in Connecticut are paid far less than they deserve, and this has serious consequences for both teachers and students. By setting a minimum salary, we can attract and retain the best and brightest educators and provide them with the financial security they need to focus on their work in the classroom.

I am also very supportive of the provisions in the bill related to COVID pension benefit enhancement and teacher tax credit. These measures acknowledge the sacrifices that teachers have made during the pandemic and provide them with the support they need to continue doing their jobs effectively.

I am also glad to see that House Bill 6884 includes the elimination of the edTPA requirement. This requirement has been a source of stress and frustration for many teacher candidates in Connecticut, as well as their mentor teachers, and its removal will go a long way toward making the teacher preparation process more accessible and equitable.

I strongly support the provision related to raising the kindergarten start age. First, by age 5, most children have developed the necessary cognitive skills and abilities to engage in the rigorous academic and social learning that takes place in kindergarten. This includes the ability to pay attention, follow directions, communicate effectively, and adapt to the school environment and routines. This can reduce their stress and anxiety, allowing children to focus on their learning and development. Second, at age 5, children have also typically developed the social and emotional skills necessary to interact with other children and adults in a classroom setting. They are better able to share, take turns, and cooperate with others, which is important for building relationships and learning to work collaboratively. These skills are especially important for success in later grades because they have had the benefit of additional time to develop the cognitive and social skills needed for success in today's demanding classroom environments. This can also lead to greater confidence and self-esteem for our students. Many kindergarten programs include physical activities such as recess and physical education. At age 5, children are generally physically ready to participate in these activities and are better able to manage their own behavior and safety. Overall, the

age of 5 is often considered an appropriate age for children to begin kindergarten because it aligns with their cognitive, social, and physical readiness, and it is often a legal requirement in some states. And finally, raising the minimum age to five may also lead to a lower risk of behavioral problems, which is pervasive in our schools in all grade levels in the wake of the pandemic. By providing children with a later start to their education, we can set them on a path to success in school and in life.

I urge the committee to move forward the provision for play-based learning. There are many benefits to play-based learning. It encourages creativity because students are allowed to use their imaginations which aids in the development of a wide range of skills and abilities. Social skills are developed as children learn to interact with others, share, take turns and negotiate in a play-based environment, which leads to the development of important social skills. Play-based learning promotes problem solving skills and decision making. This also allows students to practice and develop language skills through their interactions with others, telling stories and using language to express themselves. Play based learning involves physical activities that help children develop fine and gross motor skills. It encourages independence as children learn to make choices for themselves and take risks in a safe and supportive environment. And finally, it fosters a love of learning. Play-based learning can help children develop a positive attitude toward learning, which can help them have continued positive success in later grades and at its best fosters a love of learning that lasts their whole lives.

Teachers deserve a duty-free prep time because it allows them to effectively plan, prepare, and organize their lessons, activities, and assessments for their students. During this time, teachers can review student work, evaluate student progress, develop lesson plans, create instructional materials, and collaborate with other teachers. This prep time is crucial for ensuring that teachers can provide their students with high-quality instruction and support. Additionally, duty-free prep time allows teachers to take care of their own professional development needs. They can use this time to attend conferences, workshops, and training sessions, which can help them develop new skills, stay up-to-date with the latest teaching methods and technologies, and collaborate with other educators. Without duty-free prep time, teachers would have to complete these essential tasks outside of regular school hours, which can lead to increased stress, burnout, and decreased job satisfaction. It can also impact the quality of instruction and support that teachers are able to provide to their students.

An educator bill of rights is another important provision of this bill. It is important for Connecticut to include this provision for many reasons. First, it can ensure that educators are treated fairly and equitably and that our basic rights, such as the right to due process and the freedom of expression are protected. Providing clear rights and protections will also help attract

and maintain quality educators, improve morale and job satisfaction which directly impacts better outcomes for students. When educators feel supported and valued, they are more likely to be effective in their teaching roles which will lead to improved student achievement. A bill of rights can also help to address systemic issues such as inequities in resources and support in classrooms which we know negatively impacts student outcomes.

In conclusion, I urge you to support House Bill 6884 and its provisions related to the recruitment, retention, and enhancement of the teaching profession. As a teacher, I can tell you that these measures are essential to ensuring the continued success of Connecticut's education system and the well-being of teachers across the state.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Voisine
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